

Information and Orientation Expert Meeting – 13 March 2013

Summary Notes

This meeting was facilitated by the Information and Orientation Team of the Integration Branch at Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The opinions expressed in these notes do not necessarily reflect those of Citizenship and Immigration Canada or the Government of Canada.

Overview

The third annual **Information and Orientation Experts Meeting** was held on Wednesday, March 13th, 2013, with 23 participants.

This year's experts came from across the country (BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland), and included SPO front-line workers, executive directors, curriculum and web experts, and academics.

Main themes:

- *Welcome to Canada*
- Group orientations and how they are carried out across the country
- How best to maintain a national network on information and orientation

Introduction to the Day

Yves St. Germain, Director of Information, Language and Community Program Policy at CIC's Integration Branch, did a short presentation highlighting the importance of Information and Orientation (I&O) within the context of the many changes taking place within CIC.

Theme 1: Welcome to Canada: How to Get Your Input

Cédric de Chardon provided an explanation of the Settlement Information Renewal Exercise (SIRE) and the development of *Welcome to Canada*.

- The new *Welcome to Canada* (WTC) is one product of SIRE, to be released the 25th of March (UPDATE: actually took place April 2). More than 300 000 copies printed for distribution at Ports of Entry and from SPOs. Online access will be encouraged as much as possible (PDF and E-book versions will be available)
- SIRE is intended to be evergreen: the initial version will not be perfect. Topics had to be selected, some of those decisions made quickly (SIRE will eventually have more topics than WTC)
- CIC would like the help from participants (and members of the Community of Practice, etc.) in improving WTC. Providing feedback on WTC from SPOs and other experts provides the opportunity to influence CIC. Web version is more dynamic, and changes can be made quickly. Updates to the text will have to wait until the next printing.

Discussion - Print copies vs. web:

- Feedback from Orientation to Ontario (O2O) process: the print copies are hard to update – web content easy. Once the CLB was lower than 4 or 5, the materials become less useful. O2O workshops are facilitated in additional languages, and the booklet is available in 13 languages. Preliminary results are positive. The workbook is in a binder format, so it's easy to update: add something in a pocket, or replace a page. This feature extends the shelf-life. Web version includes action plan tool. See orientationontario.ca.
- Question posed by participant: *Is it important to have a print guide if it's so hard to keep it up to date?*
 - With electronic version, pieces can be taken apart, and SPOs can add local information for use on the ground. If pieces are broken up and separated, they can be forwarded with a standard line indicating the source (and therefore where to go for more information)
 - Use on web and mobile devices may suffice
 - Cédric – answer to print/web only is complex. When people first arrive, they often will go without internet at home for the first 6 weeks. Additionally, during the first little while after arrival, newcomers will spend a lot of time in waiting rooms, and will have some time to read things as a result. It's still worth it to have some print copies.
 - Cédric – not necessarily any difficulties in terms of FPT overlap in the case of WTC; WTC largely refers readers to provincial sources
- Print version may be more useful if it sticks to 'more basic' information (i.e. credential recognition). Some information explaining the settlement sector jargon and what is what meant by ELT, JSW, etc. could be helpful
- Comment that many GARs will leave all information documents provided to them at reception houses. However, GARs really do use the 'First Steps' books (which are done in refugees' mother tongues). Information provided in sessions is tailored to this book.

Getting Feedback on Welcome to Canada

- Suggestion from academic to set up an advisory group for the purpose of providing feedback, including representatives from the settlement sector, newcomers, and CIC
 - Another academic suggested the use of an online survey to get feedback (publication mentioned survey available on CIC website and provides link)
 - Suggestion that small groups could be set up to ensure that micro-level data stays up to date (i.e. small group devoted to particular topic). Groups could be responsible for maintaining a database for web links. In the case of O2O, there are networks connected to the local portals, to ensure updates are made
- Useful addition to WTC could be information regarding how same mainstream services are available in rural and urban areas (i.e. education)
- View that WTC should not include information beyond what is needed in the first few weeks. Longer term information (i.e. citizenship) should be removed.
- Worker from a Newcomer Information Centre pointed out that their office is full of information pamphlets available to newcomers, but newcomers prefer to sit and talk to someone.

- Frontline worker said she could see a use in WTC in terms of people whom she speaks to once, and never sees again. The worker can highlight sections for the client (filter information), and the client may read the rest later. Whole booklet without filtering could be dangerous.
- Yves asks question— how do we reach more isolated people (aka family members and not just the principal applicant)? Answers:
 - Language level is an issue. As a result, the very dense WTC could be discouraging
 - Adaptation of the material into other forms helps
- Best way to reach isolated people is to filter information through settlement workers who have read the book. In one centre, workers will tell husbands to send their wives in for services, then workers will talk wives through a lot of information to help their understanding

THEME 2: Group Orientation

Paul explains that there is interest in the Government of Canada moving towards a national group orientation approach. The idea would be to ensure equal access to information across the country, with a similarity in national level materials.

- Incredible variety across the country in terms of group orientation; sessions can last from less than an hour to four weeks in length
- For most SPOs, limited participant time is a big barrier. Many SPOs have taken the approach of offering orientation sessions as part of LINC classes, often during the lunch break.
- It is a common practice to run a form of needs assessment at the beginning of the session, to get a sense of what participants need to know, and then tailor the session to meet those needs
- Many SPOs offer occasional topic-specific sessions based on needs they see arising among clients, sometimes based on information from LINC classes
- Many SPOs offer relevant sessions according to the time of year, for example, tax sessions in February or March
- Orientation sessions are often interpreted into or delivered in participants' mother tongue
- Many SPOs will call in guest speakers to address specific topics
- Some SPOs include walks or bus tours around the community as part of their orientation practice
- SPOs serving remote areas are making use of technologies like Skype to deliver sessions
- Outreach and promotion often difficult. Referral processes vary:

Discussion – How do we standardize orientation sessions? Should we?

- Should have a national level orientation session, but it should be done pre-arrival, and repeated after arrival. Three modules should be done: federal, provincial/territorial, and local.
- What about taking an outcomes approach similar to the CLBs? Develop outcomes, let agencies develop curriculum, etc., to reach those outcomes
- It is important to have orientation across the board. But it will be problematic if CIC offers something on top of what is already available provincially – these efforts need to be combined. Integrate federal content into provincial sessions?
- What about modelling something off of Tutela?

- Youth orientation example – would be good to learn from BC example.
- Standardization approach should be more suggestive, less prescriptive
- Learn from the RAP example: there is a handbook, but it will be used in different ways by different presenters
- Would it be mandatory? Suggestion to go for ‘strong encouragement’ to attend. The challenge is to get people to come
 - Getting the CLB assessment is a big incentive for people attending the Entry program. Word of mouth helps, people like it
 - An incentive to connect with the program would help – perhaps connected to SIN or Health cards?
 - Child care and daily stipend?
- How well is the information you’re giving being received? Newcomers will always have certain issues foremost in their mind: it’s distracting. Can be a good idea to make the orientation stretch out over a year - this could be the reason for the cited 6-12 month after arrival being the best time for orientation

Theme 3: Maintaining a National Network on Information and Orientation

Question: For discussion: Is there interest in creating a more formal body for raising the profile of information and orientation?

- We don’t want just another forum to sit and listen to CIC presentations. Keeping an open discussion with people on the ground and this kind of forum – yes. Should be representative of all situations (urban, rural, all across Canada)
- Cédric: We want to keep this going, but to get money, you need visibility
- This would require the official body having a lot of trust in the expert panel
- The fact that this forum has EDs, front line workers, etc., makes it interesting

Paul: Who should we try to include in a more formal body? PTs?

- MCI has had so much interest in orientation – PTs would make sense to include
- Paul: perhaps could frame PT involvement as: do you put money into information and orientation? Do you have expertise? (This idea supported)
- No larger than group present
- Does NLAB feed into the National Settlement Council? Answer: Yes, one person sits in on behalf of NLAB. Paul: Would it help to have a representative for us at NSC?
- Have a panel at NSC conference? That would raise the I&O profile. We could all meet there.
- Cédric: We will continue this forum, aim for something Tutela-like? Discussion to be continued on COP about raising profile. Lots of questions remain – we just need to raise the profile. We have products, let’s define ourselves.

WRAP UP

